

TO: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent

FROM: Robin Desmond, Chief Academic Officer

DATE: June 12, 2020

RE: Report on the Creegan TV Studio

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The following report is in response to the motion by School Committee member Michael Dillion:

*Request the Superintendent provide an update on the Creegan TV Studio (staffing, technology capabilities, and usage) for discussion on incorporating online content production into future technology planning.*

Attached please find a report from Bryan Wilkins, Lowell High School Educational Program Coordinator, in response to the motion requesting an update on the Creegan Television Studio. Currently, Lowell Public School staff have been requesting Mr. Wilkins's assistance with accessing the Discover Video Server to support remote learning. There are many videos and audio media items available through this online media library. Mr. Wilkins will continue to provide support around accessing the online video server. For the fall, outreach to schools will continue to assist in providing staff support to expand access to this resource.



## Report on School Committee Motion

By Michael Dillon Jr.

Request the Superintendent provide an update on the Creegan TV Studio (staffing, technology capabilities, and usage) for discussion on incorporating online content production into future technology planning.

May 27, 2020 - Bryan Wilkins

### What We've Accomplished

#### The Raider Report

The 2019-2020 academic School year saw the return of the Raider Report, a live daily news show that is broadcast to every LHS advisory. Producing a live show everyday can be a daunting task, but our students not only kept up with broadcasting everyday, they also built upon the quality of the show as the school year progressed. At the height of our school year (just before being released due to COVID-19) we had a live broadcast that included a live shot of a student reporting on sports.



Students producing the Raider Report Tracy Adamson (left) and Brandon McCarthy (right) prepare for their live shot to cover sports.

#### Our First Live Broadcast Using The New Truck

The Creegan Media Studio Students were excited to use the newly outfitted remote production vehicle to cover a very important event in Lowell. When the teachers and administrators unions approached us to once again cover their bi-annual candidates forum, our students stepped up to the challenge. Students were trained in every facet of live video production in preparation for their big event. Using our remote production truck to bring programming like this engages our students in the process of production, while fostering civic engagement, working as a team, and contributing to the greater good of their community.

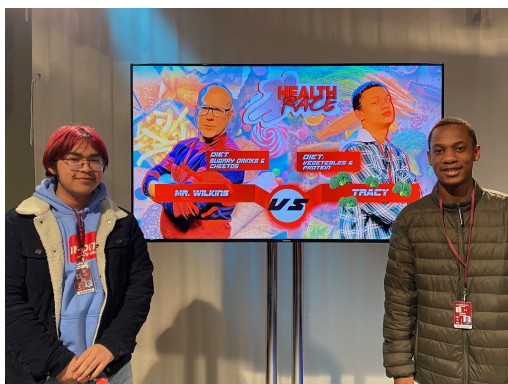


### Digital Film Course Offerings

What began as a Dual-Enrollment Film Studies course through Middlesex Community College has now blossomed into a hands on film course where students gain experience in creating through the language of film. At the start of the 2019-2020 school year, Mrs. Deb Freeley began offering Digital Film Production to Lowell High School students as a way to practice the theories they learned in their film studies class. Now, with all of the broadcasting and live production programs we offer, students can also add to their repertoire the art of filmmaking.

### Dual Enrollment Graphics Collaborates with the Raider Report

This year, Mrs. O'Leary's dual enrollment class spent several weeks in the Colleen Creegan Media Studio working on a graphics collaboration where her talented students would create materials for the Raider Report.



Her students were so excited to work in “such a cool environment” and we were so happy to have their graphic contributions go out on our live show! As a result of the work of Mrs. O’leary’s amazing students, the quality of our daily broadcast improved leaps and bounds from where it was before.

### Work Toward Getting a Sponsor For Our Truck Program

The mission of our Remote Truck Program is to broaden the technological skills of our students, prepare our students for the career field of media and communications, and to produce educational and community based content for the city of Lowell. In order to maintain a program that is equitable to all students, we need to ensure that our after school production experiences are accessible. For many of our students, financial hardships force them to make a difficult decision between taking part in a learning opportunity and having a part time job. We believe these very students need career training and after school learning opportunities the most. To make this decision easier for our students and families, we are building our program around a training certificate structure that will allow students who build their skills to be paid for their time on after school productions. This sponsorship will be the key piece to ensuring these opportunities, which serve as an extension to the classroom, are equitable to all students at Lowell High School.

## Staffing

With the cuts to our staff in June of 2018 reducing two full time positions, the past two years have been a challenge for the Colleen Creegan Media Studio (CCMS). While I was hired as a producer and support person for the CCMS, I have taken on the maintenance and managerial tasks performed by the Coordinator and Associate producer position, which were cut in 2018. As a result of these cuts, I have not been able to maintain the level of content creation I had in the past as I am focusing my attention on keeping what is in place going. Ideally, a full time producer position would be created to build back the educational programming content to where it once was. Another alternative would be to create two part-time associate producer positions as a way of lowering costs by not carrying benefits while leveraging a third person to be on board for large events (like the UTL Candidates forum my students covered this past fall, LHS Graduation, and the Lowell Folk Festival).

### Bryan Wilkins - Digital Media Producer

I remain as the only person on staff for the CCMS. I work full time to maintain Lowell Educational Television (Educational Access Station in Lowell) as well as the facilities and technologies of the LHS Media Studio. Additionally, as of the 2019-2020 academic school year, I have also taken on teaching Advanced Digital Media Production for the LHS Fine Arts Department.

Here are just a few of the daily responsibilities that my position covers:



- Create, produce, and amass all media content for Lowell Educational Television, the 24/7 educational access station for the City of Lowell (Comcast Channel 22).
- Manage the broadcast scheduling playout and online presence of such programs delivered on our 24/7 cable channel and our website, let22.org.
- Assemble all budget proposals and communicate those proposals to the Lowell Public Schools finance department and the City of Lowell finance department.
- Manage service contracts for all major servers to ensure they are paid, up to date, and in good standing.
- Research technologies as part of the budget process to ensure our students receive the latest in media equipment.
- Manage the CCMS multi-camera production studio; a full size broadcast production studio.
- Maintain all media related servers including:
  - Telvue Broadcast Server (Channel 22)
  - InfoVue Bulletin Board messaging servers (Channel 22 and LHS)
  - EditShare Media Server- Media Storage for all student project media files.
  - Discover Video On Demand Server- Server stores media for integration into the classroom curriculum.
  - Archive Media Server- NAS for our broadcast media to be archived.
- Manage the Lowell Educational Television website (let22.org).
- Develop after school media based enrichment programs wherein students receive media education through hands-on activities.
- Develop and produce educational programming that informs and entertains the residents of the City of Lowell.
- Directly support the fine arts media production teacher with any technology and production assistance needed for successful instruction.
- Maintain the CCMS remote production vehicle's mechanical and technological needs.
- Collaborate with faculty and staff to bring media creation into the classroom curriculum as an instructional support.

### Connor Crosby - Part Time Production Assistant For TV Truck Program

In Late February, Jessica Daviso (Fine Arts Department Chair) was able to hire Connor Crosby (a former star student of the Creegan Program) through use of Perkins Grant funding. This position is a part time assistant for career pathway and remote truck productions and adds about 5 hours of weekly support throughout the year. With the closure of school canceling our Remote Production Truck program, his hours have now been concentrated in working with the Digital Media Producer to develop logistics, recruiting tactics, after school student management plans, and training procedures in preparation for next years after school production activity.

## Technology & Usage

### Outside Broadcast Vehicle (Remote Studio Truck)

Our Outside Broadcast Vehicle is our most up to date production tool. It includes 3 HD cameras, an Instant Replay system, full audio engineering equipment, and a super versatile electrical system that can run off a generator or standard 20 amp service. While we are excited to have been able to use this truck for the UTL candidates forum, we were unable to grow our coverage because of staffing limitations. So, with the support of Jessica Daviso, we were able to bring in Connor Crosby as the assistant to support an after school program. Unfortunately, the sudden closure of school in March put a halt to our progress, but here is our plan moving forward.

For the 2020-2021 school year, we are expecting that we will be able to run the Assistant Producer position as a support to the after school Remote Truck Program. This is such a crucial role when covering sports and large events due to the level of technology used as well as what is required in managing students that are spread out over a large area. Given we return to the LHS campus in the fall, we will immediately begin recruiting students and training them to work as crew for the production truck. We expect that we would be able to cover events as early as October if all goes as planned.

Here are some of the programs that we will aim to cover using out truck:

- Yearly Air Force Junior ROTC events (911 Ceremony, Veterans day).
- Between 2 and 3 sporting events per season totaling 6-9 events yearly.
- All fine art performances
  - LHS Dance Winter and Spring
  - LHS Music Concerts Winter and Spring
  - Theater Performances (licencing permitting)
- Knowledge Bowl (3 semifinal and 1 final competition)
- Distinguished Alumni
- Honors Night
- LHS Graduation
- The Lowell Folk Festival (full weekend live coverage)

An additional obstacle that I encountered when trying to create this truck program was student commitment. For many of our students, financial hardships force them to make a difficult decision between taking part in a learning opportunity and having a part time job. To make participation in our Remote Production program easier for our students and families, we are building our program around a training certificate structure that will allow students who build their skills to be paid for their time on after school productions. Thanks to Superintendent Dr. Boyd, Billie Jo Turner, and Kerry Kerns, and with the support of Brian Martin and Leo & Judy Creegan, we were able to get an RFP posted that would bring in a key sponsor to provide funding to pay students for these events. The goal of the RFP timeline is to have funds in place by late Fall as we begin our event coverage for the year.

It's important that the School Committee know that this important position of Assistant producer (Connor Crosby) is only a temporary solution as the Perkins Grant funding will not allow this to run long term. So we respectfully ask that this staffing position be considered in future budget discussions so that we may create a sustainable remote production program.

### Broadcast Studio (In-House)

Our in-house multi-camera production studio is the home to all of our studio produced content. This space is used everyday as a classroom for training all of our students and as the hub of our daily news show, *The Raider Report*. In addition to daily use, the studio is an invaluable space that we use to create content in an efficient manner. When anyone from the LHS or school department needs to communicate quickly and effectively, we are able to use our in house studio at a moment's notice to create content.

Our in-house production studio is a space that is in need of substantial upgrades. I have been advocating for funds that would upgrade our studio cameras (purchased in 1997), video switcher (last upgraded in 2011), live graphics system, audio mixer (last upgraded in 2007), clear com intercom system (original from 1997), and our lighting grid (original from 1997). Because of the expense of these upgrades we will need to wait for our new building and swing space to see improvements. I have made the architects aware of our needs and they are in full support of upgrading our swing space, which will come online before the Spring of 2022 demolition of our current space.

### Live Broadcast Portable Cart

For smaller or on campus events that don't require the in-depth technology of our mobile production truck, we are able to utilize a portable cart. This cart allows us to connect 3-6 cameras into a video switcher to cover live events from several angles. While the mobile cart is not as capable as our truck, it can be a great solution when crews are smaller.

### Digital Cinema/ Film Technologies

The tools for creating the 'film look' have never been more accessible than they are today. With DSLR cameras being able to record video, we are now able to have access to several elements in the language and aesthetics of film. Our Digital Film Production course offerings now give students the opportunity to hone the craft of filmmaking in a hands on learning environment. Not only is the art form of film more accessible, the tools used to make these films are widely used by professional video production companies everywhere. The popularity of the film aesthetic means that the training students receive in this course is in high demand.

Because of such a demand for the 'film look', I proposed support equipment for this program in my 2020-2021 budget proposal. If we are able to get funding to give our students the tools

they need to grow their skill set, our students would enter college and the workforce well ahead of their peers from other school districts.

### Electronic News Gathering Camera Kits (ENG)

ENG camera kits are an essential all in one tool that news stations around the world utilize everyday. These cameras are built for utility and often don't have the beauty and aesthetics of a digital film camera. However, their biggest strength is that they can be set up and operated quickly and easily, giving our students the efficiency needed to get their story out asap. This past year we were able to provide our Advanced Digital Media Production students with brand new ENG camera kits that will allow them to not have to share cameras with the Intro level students. This will greatly improve production quality as well as availability of equipment to all of our students.

For our intro level students we will need to upgrade their camera kits in the coming years. The cameras they are using now were last upgraded in 2010 and will find themselves not compatible with our editing software very soon. Because of the amount of cameras needed (between 10 and 15) this will be a big ticket item for future budgets.

### Digital Media Lab (Teachers Classroom)

The Digital Media Lab is where many of our Fine Arts course offerings take place. This lab was last updated in 2011 with 25 iMac computers and the latest editing software of the time. Today, we are down to 20 computers and are struggling with editing software that is out of date and unable to handle the latest video codecs (compression schemes for video). Our plan at this point is to wait for our new swing space where we are expecting new computers along with our move.

### Advanced Level Edit Rooms

These edit rooms are used everyday by our Advanced Digital Media students and for students wanting to continue their classwork after school. Having these separate edit rooms in our Colleen Creegan Media Studio gives a real feel for the creative environment of professional production houses. Students are able to work privately and creatively in smaller groups in an area devoid of distractions.

We've also been able to bring in other classes, when these edit rooms are not being used in our media class offerings, to allow teachers from within the high school to incorporate media technology in a hands on project. Most recently, Mrs. O'Leary's Dual Enrollment Graphics students made these rooms their home base for a collaborative project where her students created graphics for the Raider Report.



## Online Content Production Technology

### Lowell Educational Televisions Website (let22.org)

With the 2019-2020 allocation of funding from the Comcast PEG account, I was able to get Lowell Educational Television's website (let22.org) back up and running. Now that we have this online media outlet, our production server is able to send live streams directly to our website. Through a yearly subscription, we are also able to maintain an online Video on Demand library that interacts with our main broadcasting server. So every video that we produce and broadcast on channel 22, can now be available on our website in a very streamlined process. With our web presence back in full force, my plan is to continue showcasing student work front and center for everyone to see what our students are producing.

These online video options are yearly subscriptions, in order for this to continue, we require annual financial allocation. The cost of these recurring expenses are outlined in the 2020-2021 budget proposal that I sent to Billie Jo and the City of Lowell.

### Live Streaming Technologies

Currently we have the technology to stream video from our remote production truck, portable production cart, and main studio to a variety of streaming outlets. The one main hangup for us comes with the fact that the LPS network is closed to social media, youtube, and other sites that we would use as a streaming conduit. My goal next year is to see if we can get permission to stream everything we cover as a live event through social media. That way parents and family members can gain access to important events without having to leave work or find a babysitter for the night.

### Discover Video Media Server

When it comes to classroom media materials, it is important now more than ever that we maintain our video & Media library. Our Discover Video Server (DEVOS) houses hundreds of video and audio media that teachers can make available to students working to learn from home. I'm so happy that I have been able to assist teachers who have been using this for their remote learning plans. Currently, our dual enrollment Film Studies class has all of their course movies available for students to watch from home. Because of the crucial role this server plays in classroom media access, I maintain a service contract through Discover Video to ensure support is available at a moments notice.

The Discover Video server also provides a central access point for live streaming Comcast Cable channels for educational purposes. This makes important cable channels like PBS, The Discovery Channel, National Geographic, and others, available to our educators to bring into their classrooms. In the coming years my plan is to build upon the channels that are currently available to offer our educational facilities more cable access to more programming.